

1882

Superintendent's  
Report

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1882

P. H. Conquer

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK.



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## YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

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ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE  
SUPERINTENDENT  
OF THE  
YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK  
TO THE  
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

P. H. CONGER,  
SUPERINTENDENT.

FOR THE YEAR 1882.



WASHINGTON:  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
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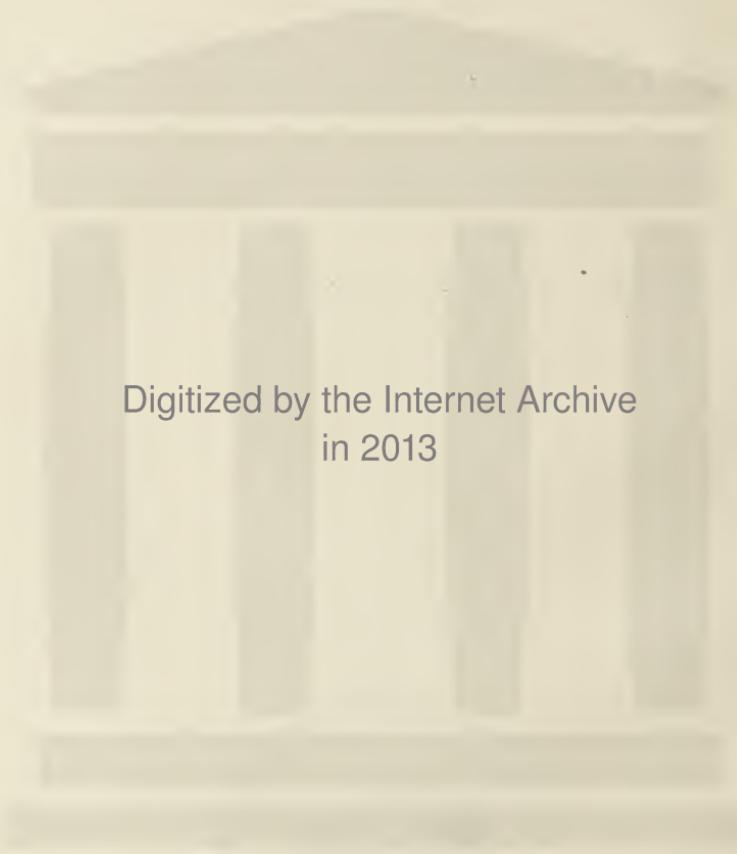
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REPORT  
OF THE  
SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK.

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HEADQUARTERS YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK,  
*Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyo., December 1, 1882.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit the following as my annual report: I arrived in the Park on the 22d day of May, coming in by the Union Pacific Railroad from Omaha to Ogden, thence by the Utah Northern Railroad to Dillon, thence by stage to Virginia City, Mont. From there I was obliged to take private conveyance up the valley of the Madison River to its head in the great Fire-Hole Basin, a distance from Virginia City of 115 miles. After remaining there at the Marshall House two days, Mr. Marshall, with Mr. George Graham (a blacksmith, whom I had hired at Virginia City for the season), my son, and myself, set out on horseback for the Mammoth Hot Springs, the official headquarters of the Park, a distance of 50 miles over the mountains. It was a severe and perilous journey, on account of the snow and the swollen rivers and mountain streams that lay across our way. However, thanks to the experience and indomitable courage of my guides and the endurance of our faithful horses, we all reached headquarters in safety the second day out, a little before midnight.

On reaching the house all was dark and silent, but we soon made ourselves heard. A light gleamed through the windows, the door was thrown open, and we were invited in by Mr. Stephens, the superintendent in charge, with a generous cordiality seldom found elsewhere than in these mountains.

After spending a day or two at headquarters, and advising with Mr. Stephens, I started with two teams for Bozeman, Mont., our nearest market town (from this point 80 miles distant), to purchase us supplies and tools, hire a crew of men, and prepare for the season's campaign. The road was in a horrible condition, consequently we could haul but light loads, yet we succeeded in landing sufficient supplies to last until better roads.

We also hired a small crew of men which we set at work on the 5th of June, at the north side of the Park, near the Yellowstone River, at the foot of McCartney's hill. We also employed a carpenter and a mason, and set about repairing the headquarter's house, which we found to be in a sadly dilapidated condition, and hardly habitable for a white man. Our mason first burned a small limekiln, and then pointed the house from the ground to the roof, inside and out, and whitewashed the wall through all of the inside until it was white as snow, thereby destroying the vermin that infested the premises in such vast numbers that no person with a cuticle less sensitive than that of a rhinoceros could live in them through the summer months. Meantime our carpenter was at work repairing the doors, windows, roof, and other parts of

the building, putting up ceiling overhead with cotton cloth, for want of lumber; making domestic furniture, such as tables, bedsteads, and settees; the latter we covered with calico, making a convenient seat for the numerous callers that have visited us the past summer. So we can now say that the government buildings here are in a state of preservation, and comfortable, if not elegant.

Simultaneously with commencing work on this side of the Park, I had taken steps to organize and equip another party to begin work at Riverside, on the Madison River, near the west line of the Park, and near the point where the travel from Virginia City and a place on the Utah Northern Railroad called Beaver Cañon unite, and proceed together to the central attraction, the Fire-Hole Basin and the great geysers. Here I found it necessary to do some heavy grading. Heretofore the travel had been forced principally to reach the Fire-Hole Basin by following the river through a difficult and rough cañon, involving the fording of the stream five times in the short distance of about 10 miles. The Madison River at this point is a broad and rapid stream, and except in time of low water these crossings are both difficult and dangerous. A good road, however, can be made through this cañon when the government will supply the money. I estimate that it will cost not less than \$15,000 to bridge and grade about 20 miles of this route. Under these circumstances there seemed to me nothing left us but to try and scale the mighty mountains and hills that lie along the Madison, and between us and our objective point.

The Fire-Hole Basin work was begun here on the 8th of June, and after six weeks of hard digging, plowing, and scraping, the summit was attained, leaving behind us a road and grade up which our four-mule team has hauled repeatedly a load of freight weighing over 2,500 pounds. This party, headed by Mr. George Graham and my son, C. M. Conger (when not engaged in doing blacksmith work or hunting), proceeded on the road towards the Fire-Hole, removing the stumps and rocks from the path, putting in culverts and cross-ways or bridges over mirey ground and deep gulleys, until they reached the big hills on the verge of the basin, where another long and heavy grade had to be made to let us down to a level with the Fire-Hole River at Marshall Hotel.

In the meantime the party commencing work at McCartney's hill had been recruited to about a dozen men, and placed under the command of Capt. E. S. Topping. They worked up from McCartney's, making an excellent road, considering the high and rough character of the ground over which the road lies. Thence they pushed on over the immense mountains which surround the valley of the Gardiner River at this place, doing all that could be done to render passable the road out over this range, until a level plateau is reached, over which our way passes for a distance of about 8 miles, bringing us to the main branch of the Gardiner River, and about 12 miles from headquarters. Here we found it necessary to construct a bridge, as the river is deep and rapid, and an attempt to ford it, except at low water, is attended with great difficulty and danger. Indeed, a party of tourists went into camp for a week here, waiting for a decline of the water before venturing to cross. My assistant, Mr. G. L. Henderson, went with me out to the river, and, after a careful examination of the same for a mile or two, up and down, we agreed upon the most eligible point to locate the bridge, and upon the plan of its construction. Captain Topping and his men took hold of the work in earnest, and in less than two weeks they had finished a substantial structure across the river that we think reflects credit upon its builders. The bridge is built with abutments on each shore, well

out into the river. The abutments are made by a crib of logs firmly pinned together at the corners, and then filled with rock above high-water mark. The center pier we made in the shape of a V, fastened in the same manner at the corner, and filled, like the abutments, with rock; then the structure was covered with hewn logs five inches thick, the whole making a bridge that I think will stand any strain that is likely to happen it, either from the elements or otherwise. The cover of the bridge is 96 feet long. Up to this time it was the custom of Mr. Henderson or myself to be on the ground daily with the men; and, indeed, during the whole season one or both of us has been in the field nearly all of the time.

After the bridge was finished, the captain, with his party, pushed on south toward the Fire-Hole Basin, that being the grand center towards which both parties were aiming. Our route now runs up the Willow Creek to near the great obsidian or glass mountain, which is a marvelous thing in nature and well worth the journey to see. There was considerable work on this part of the road in taking out rocks in the path, and building and repairing culverts and cross-ways.

After passing the glass mountain we soon come upon high hills and rough country, requiring a great amount of labor to render the road passable. We are now leaving the waters that flow into the Gardiner River, and are climbing the mountains that separate the Gardiner from the Gibbon River. About here we pass a beautiful lake, called Lake of the Woods. I do not know what the altitude is at this point, but it cannot be less than 7,500 feet above sea level.

From thence we worked our way over a rough and hilly country to the Gibbon Basin, where the traveler is startled by his first sight of this wonderful Fire-Hole. Standing on the eminence that surrounds and overlooks this basin, with its thousand columns of hissing steam rising to the clouds, and its hundred spouting and boiling springs, all in active operation, hurling their heated waters high into the air, he sees a sight so novel and so sublime as to daze the beholder and fill him with awe. In this basin are several large geysers and a great number of lesser ones. We have now reached a point 30 miles nearly south of headquarters, or the Mammoth Hot Springs, and about 35 miles from the north line of the Park. It is yet 20 miles to the great Fire-Hole Basin. Our road is still in a mountainous and rugged country, requiring much labor and expense before it can be said to be a good road. Still we pushed on; but owing to the limited amount of the appropriation (and when you consider the extent of the territory and the great natural obstructions that have to be encountered, it seems to me it must be evident to you that the amount heretofore placed at the disposal of the Secretary of the Interior "for the protection and improvement of the Yellowstone National Park" is entirely inadequate) we are obliged to content ourselves by making such roads and improvements only as will render travel possible.

But to proceed with our road: we have to pass over some very high hills to reach the valley of the main Gibbon, where we encounter a wide, low bottom called the Geyser Meadows, a place where it will require a large amount of labor to make a good road. After passing this meadow our road enters the Gibbon Cañon, and follows the river down several miles, close on the edge of the stream, crossing the same three times in as many miles over difficult and dangerous crossings in time of high water. After passing through this cañon our road gains the highlands by a steep grade along the side of the mountain on the south side of the river. We soon come to the great falls of the Gibbon, where the

river plunges over a perpendicular precipice of 75 feet, which in the stillness of the evergreen forest that covers this country renders the scene as enchantingly beautiful as "fairy-land." We are now within 10 miles of our objective point, viz, the Lower Fire-Hole Basin; and as the character of the country differs little from that over which we have passed, I need not particularize further than to mention that we made two quite important grades on the way, changing the road from the old track, and materially lessening the difficulties over two high and rugged hills.

At last, through much tribulation, we have arrived at the head of the Madison River, which is formed by the junction of the two Fire-Hole Rivers at the northern edge of the Lower Fire-Hole Basin. When I tell you that at this point the Madison River is a deep and rapid stream, nearly or quite 200 feet in width, you will have some conception of the immense flow of boiling hot water that comes out of the earth within less than 15 miles of this point, and forms the two Fire-Hole Rivers which here unite.

My working force (both parties) were now here, and I found it an imperative necessity to build a storehouse and blacksmith shop in order properly to care for our provisions and supplies, the government having no building nearer than our headquarters, 50 miles distant. Besides, this point is the grand center of attraction, and a place to which every tourist who visits the Park is certain to come. One other reason why I selected this site for a storehouse was, on account of its central position working parties can be supplied from this depot in one day from almost any part of the Park. After having resolved to build, and decided upon the size and style of the buildings required, I drafted the plans and set part of the men to getting out the timber for the proposed buildings.

The rest of the men, under Captain Topping, continued work on the road. I directed them first to go over the road to the Yellowstone Lake, a distance of 35 miles from this point, and put the same in good repair, and then turned their attention toward the Great Falls and the Grand Cañon of the Yellowstone, about 20 miles below the lake. The work was comparatively light on the road from the Fire-Hole to the lake; but when we neared the falls and cañon I found it necessary to cut a new road along the bank of the river for over three miles to enable tourists to ride to the falls. Heretofore they have been compelled to abandon their carriages, and climb almost impassable mountains on the back of a pony or on foot. This road along the river was a difficult and costly piece to build, requiring heavy excavation along the side of the steep mountain for nearly the whole distance. But it is finished, and we have received the commendation and thanks of every person who has passed over the road, for having built it.

Meantime our buildings are progressing at the Fire-Hole Basin, the place we now call our summer headquarters. The government storehouse here in dimensions is 34 by 22 feet, built of hewn logs, substantially and neatly put up, one story high, with solid log partition framed into the structure, making two rooms in the building. One room is floored with hewn logs, 5 inches thick, neatly fitted together, for the storage of provisions; this heavy partition and floor being necessary to protect our supplies from the ravages of the mountain rats and squirrels that here abound. The other room is not yet floored, as we have no lumber except what we manufacture with an ax; but by putting in an old cooking stove, which I was fortunate enough to obtain here, it makes a very convenient and comfortable place for us when at work in this

vicinity, besides being a great accommodation to tourists who desire to leave a portion of their luggage while they visit the lake, the Grand Cañon, and the Great Falls of the Yellowstone. We have a strong door on the storeroom, and one window in the same; also an outside door, and two windows in the front room.

The blacksmith shop is similar in construction, 20 by 20 feet, with a door and two windows. Convenient to the shop is a coal-house, 10 by 15 feet, in which I have a quantity of charcoal left over after the season's business, from a pit that we burned early in the season. The buildings are all carefully chinked on the inside and daubed on the outside, and thoroughly covered with dirt roofs, which we consider storm-proof, and will probably answer the purpose for which they were constructed, for many years.

Mr. Secretary, I would gladly have consulted you in regard to these buildings before they were begun, but the demand was so urgent, and it takes so very long to communicate by mail, in these far-off mountains, with your office, that I ventured on my own judgment to proceed without specific authority, trusting that what I might do would receive your sanction and approval.

After the buildings were completed I sent the men who had been there employed with a pack-train and outfit over to the falls to improve the trails and bridle-paths around them and the Grand Cañon, also to open a new and better bridle path from the falls along the base of Mount Washburn, via Tower Falls, to intersect the Clark's Fork wagon road near Barronett's bridge, thus enabling tourists to make a complete circuit of the Park, and to see most of the marvelous wonders of nature that so abound in this our nation's great play-ground, and which I am assured by eminent travelers are not to be found elsewhere on the globe.

It is September. Our bridle-paths are finished; our grades along the banks of the Yellowstone are completed; and the gathering snows on the distant mountain tops admonish us that we must soon seek a lesser altitude. We therefore take a parting glance at the Great Falls, the Grand Cañon, and the glorious snow-crowned mountains, and all depart for our summer headquarters in the Lower Fire-Hole Basin. Arrived there we still find plenty of work that requires our attention, notably the building of three foot-bridges, two of them across the Great Fire-Hole River, and the other across the Little Fire-Hole, near our storehouse. The bridges across the larger river are 130 feet in length, and the one across the lesser stream is 50 feet long. These bridges are built by hewing long timbers flat, and placing two pieces side by side upon strong benches standing in the river, and securely fastened together, then putting up a hand-rail along one side, enabling any person to cross with ease and safety. These foot-bridges have long been a necessity, and will prove a great convenience to ourselves as well as the public.

September 14 I took my departure for the Mammoth Hot Springs, to give attention to my office work, which I confess I had too long neglected. But (as I have before written you), deeming it of the first importance that the money appropriated by Congress for the improvement of the Park be judiciously and properly expended, I felt it to be my first duty to remain in the field to direct and supervise the work. Before leaving, I directed Captain Topping with his party to work back over the road to the Mammoth Hot Springs, and repair some crossways that had become badly demoralized by the heavy military trains and others passing over them during the summer. I left Mr. Graham and

my son with their men to finish the foot-bridges, to take an inventory of the stock and tools to be left there, to close up and lock the buildings, and then to come to the springs and construct a bridge across the Gardiner River, which had recently been destroyed by a devastating fire that had swept over a large tract of the Park in the immediate neighborhood of headquarters. I spent a few days in my office, and then took stage for Bozeman, Mont., to settle with the merchants of that bright and busy mountain city for the supplies that they had so generously advanced me for the use of the government during the season. I was thus occupied there for several days, when I again took the stage for Virginia City, Mont., another trade center in these mountains, to whose liberal merchants I was under like obligations for the same kind of favors. I closed my business here, and returned by the same route, reaching home in time to see the last plank fastened down upon our new bridge across the Gardiner. The bridge is a splendid one of the kind, and is constructed after the pattern before described. I then settled with the few men that had still stuck to the work until it was finished, which was on the 25th day of October.

The snow was now getting deep all over the Park. The bell had summoned all ashore who were not going to sail, and, not desiring to be blockaded here all winter, I bade farewell to my assistant, Mr. G. L. Henderson, and his son, whom we left in charge, and myself and wife made our escape down the valley of the Yellowstone to the North Pacific Railroad, and thence to the green fields of Iowa, our home.

Mr. Secretary, I desire to say, in concluding this prosy report, that we do not claim to have written our names upon the mountain tops here, and will be content if you shall approve, and the great public, from whose verdict there is no appeal, shall concede, that we have left our mark upon the roads, trails, and bridle-paths of this great National Park.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
P. H. CONGER,  
*Superintendent Yellowstone National Park.*

#### THE PARK.

I consider the man entitled to all honor who first had the foresight to propose to the Congress of the United States the project of setting apart this wonderful country for all time for the use and pleasure of the people. So grand an idea could emanate only from the brain of a wise and far-seeing statesman. No nation on earth has ever bequeathed to its people a nobler gift. Its area is not accurately known, but enough is known to be certain that it contains more square miles than either of two of the States in this Union. The donation was a grand one, made upon a truly American scale, and the people of this country will demand of their representatives that this great Park be opened and improved, so that the present generation may enjoy it. In this connection I would call the attention of members of Congress to the fact that heretofore the annual allowance for all purposes in the Park has been only \$15,000; and I beg them to inquire of themselves how far this sum would go toward building and repairing the roads in their State or district, and also to bear in mind that this Park is on the top of the Rocky Mountains, and that everything that enters into use there costs at the least twice as much as the same would cost in almost any of the States.

## VANDALISM IN THE PARK.

I have hardly the patience to discuss this subject without passion. The most of the depredations committed seem to me so entirely purposeless that I am unable to conceive the cause that impels men and women to wantonly destroy, purely for destruction's sake. What are we to think of a man that will pack long poles, as heavy as he can carry, a great distance, for the purpose of thrusting them into the cone and down the throat of these great geysers, when the only possible effect must be to obstruct their flow and mar their beauty? This is done repeatedly, although I have neglected no opportunity to warn, admonish, and entreat all tourists whom I have met in the Park not on any account to do so. I have also by published order, forbidden the collection of any specimens and cautioned all persons having occasion to build a fire in the Park to be certain to extinguish the same before leaving camp. But, notwithstanding all this, tourists go into the Park with iron bars and picks secreted in their wagons, with the express intent to disregard the law and defy the superintendent. The cones of the great geysers are already badly defaced, and vast tracts of the beautiful forests that adorn this Wonder-Land are laid waste by fire annually through the wanton carelessness and neglect of visitors.

Another source of great annoyance is the hunters in the Park. I am sure you will agree with me that it is not possible for a single game-keeper to guard so vast a territory as the National Park and prevent the breach of the laws in regard to the killing of game. When we consider the temptation, and the opportunity which these vast solitudes afford, we need not wonder that the laws are broken, and the orders disobeyed. But I leave it for the superior wisdom of the honorable Secretary of the Interior to suggest some remedy for these evils.

## VISITORS TO THE PARK.

Many eminent people have visited the Park the past summer, both from our own and foreign lands. A few among the more prominent names I will mention:

United States Senator Bayard, of Delaware; Commander Gorringe, of the United States Navy; Lloyd S. Bryce, of New York City; Mr. Fuller, of London, England; and Mr. Merrill, of Philadelphia, with a cavalry escort, composed the Senator's party.

General P. H. Sheridan, Col. M. P. Sheridan, General Anson Stager, of New York City; Mr. John McCullough, the great actor; General D. B. Sackett, U. S. A.; Col. James F. Gregory, U. S. A.; Mr. H. R. Bishop, New York; Mr. Charles D. Rhodes, Chicago; General W. E. Strong, Chicago; Capt. W. P. Clark, U. S. A.; Capt. J. U. Wheeler, commanding escort, with 150 men and 300 horses and pack-mules.

Mr. Edw. Massicott, a great traveler, Paris, France.

B. A. Coloma, United States Coast and Geodetic Survey.

Bishop Hurst, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Iowa.

Rev. C. H. Fowler, New York.

Joseph Moore, jr., esq., Philadelphia, a great traveler in foreign lands, and eminent author.

Captain Gibson and Lieutenant Spellman, Seventh United States Cavalry, with large party.

Dr. Sanderson, U. S. A.

Major Gordon and family, Fort Ellis, N. Y., with escort.

Major Hughes, Saint Paul, Minn.

A large party from the Omaha Board of Trade, headed by their president, Mr. Clark (a number of them having their families with them), Mr. Fitch, of the Omaha Bee, and many others.

Prof. S. C. Armstrong, Hampton, Va.

Henry W. Foote and Arthur Lyman, Boston, Mass.

Rev. Geo. Comfort and wife, with a large party of friends from Bozeman, Mont.

Dr. J. H. Warren, Janesville, Wis.

M. V. Nichols, Osage, Iowa.

Lord S. George Littledale and lady, England.

Mr. J. O. Hussey, with a large party, White Sulphur Springs, Mont.

Samuel Mallory and wife, with friends, Montana.

Alanson Trask, esq., with family and friends, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Hon. J. C. Burrows, M. C., Michigan.

Earl Hope, of Hopeton, Scotland, with consin and large retinue of servants.

A. T. Argens, Copenhagen, LL. D. and envoy of the King of Denmark.

We had also a German count, and many other people of distinction whom I must omit to name.

We had on our register at headquarters on the 15th of October 815 names, and we estimate that not one-tenth part of the visitors to the Park the past season came to headquarters at all. Taking this estimate as a basis, there could not have been less than ten thousand people there the past season. Indeed, it has seemed that the people of our own country are just beginning to find out that there is such a place as the Yellowstone National Park, while it has attracted the attention of European scientists and travelers ever since it was first known. The distinguished travelers of our own country who have been there the past summer have told me that they felt compelled to visit the Park, so that they might be able to answer the thousands of inquiries that are made of them concerning this great Wonder-Land, wherever they go, in all parts of the earth. From this I think it safe to predict that as soon as the great railroads are completed to the borders of the Park, and the roads in the Park made comfortable by grading and bridging, it will speedily become the most popular summer resort in this or any land.

#### LINES OF TRAVEL LEADING TO THE PARK.

The tourist desiring to visit the Park, who may be, we will say, at Chicago, has his choice of either of the great Pacific railroads. The Union Pacific via Omaha to Ogden, thence by the Utah Northern to Beaver Cañon, where he takes stage or private conveyance up the valley of the Snake River to the Lower Fire-Hole Basin, a little over 100 miles from the railroad. Or he can take the northern route via Saint Paul and the North Pacific to Livingstone (Benson's Landing), from whence a branch road is to be built, I am informed, early next season, to the borders of the Park near my headquarters, 65 miles from Livingstone. In this connection I will also say, that active operations are already in progress to build and have ready for the accommodation of the public a number of elegant hotels at the points of greatest interest throughout the Park, so that tourists will not be compelled, as heretofore, to carry their own supplies, and camp on the ground.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

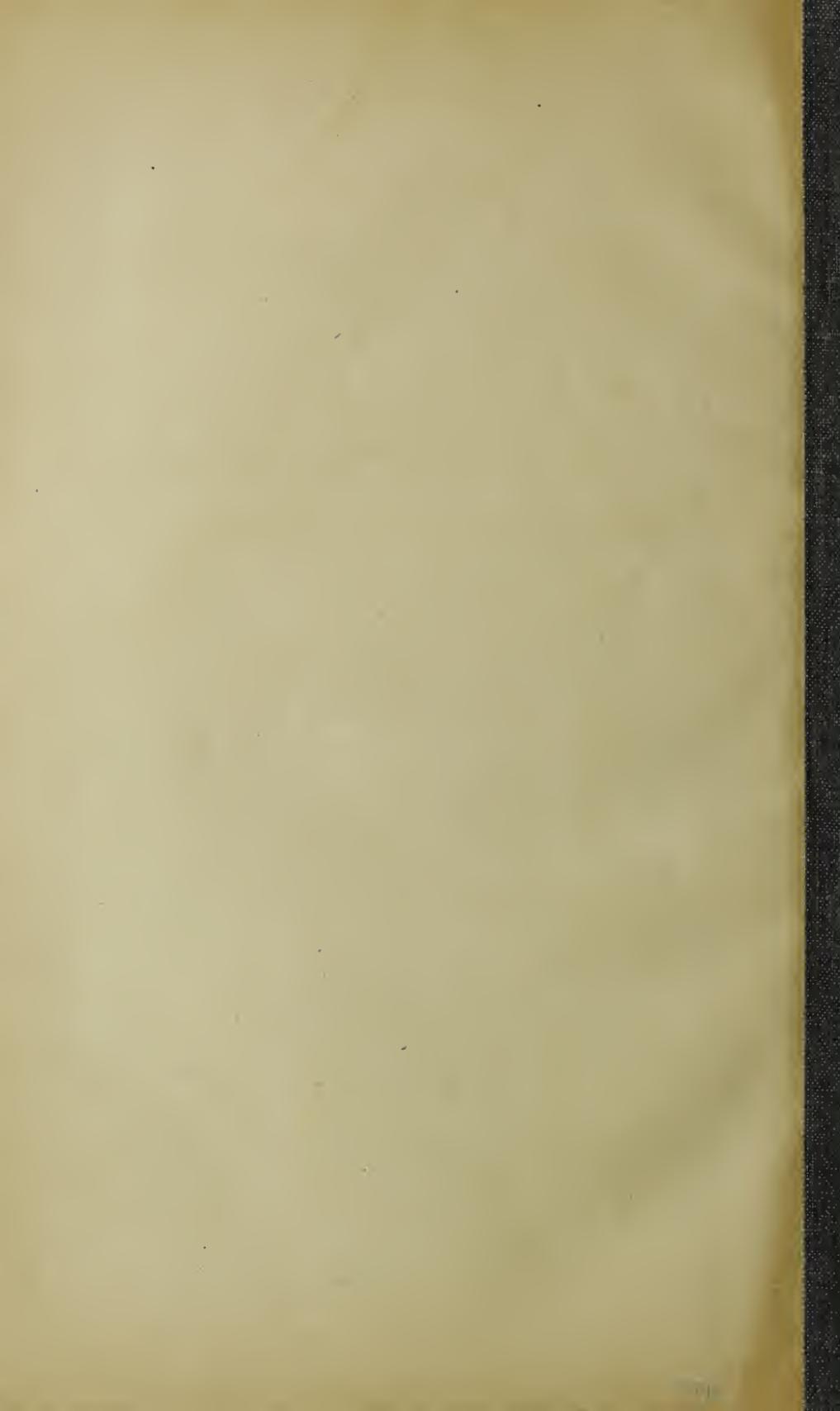
P. H. CONGER.

Hon. H. M. TELLER,

*Secretary of the Interior.*







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